

Message Text

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ORIGIN EA-07

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PA-04 RSC-01 /013 R

DRAFTED BY EA/OVARMSTRONG:MHS

APPROVED BY EA - OVARMSTRONG

EA - AMB. MARTIN (SUBS)

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P 111901Z AUG 74

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY SAIGON PRIORITY

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAID, VS

SUBJECT: WASHINGTON POST EDITORIAL ON AID FOR VIETNAM

FOR CHARGE

1. FOLLOWING IS FULL TEXT WASHINGTON POST EDITORIAL
AUGUST 11 ENTITLED "AID FOR VIETNAM".

2. BEGIN TEXT:

CONGRESS, IN ITS DELIBERATIONS ON AID FOR SOUTH VIETNAM,
IS SHYING AWAY FROM THE CENTRAL ISSUE: WHAT IS THE
AMERICAN INTEREST? FOR IF IT MATTERS TO THE UNITED STATES
WHETHER SAIGON FARES WELL OR ILL, ONE AID STRATEGY IS DIC-
TATED; AND IF NOT, ANOTHER. TO PROCEED AS THOUGH THE LEVEL
AND KIND OF AID HAS NO REAL CONNECTION TO THE GOAL OF
AMERICAN POLICY IS TO FLY BLIND.

LIKE MANY AMERICANS, WE HAD HOPED THAT THE PARIS AGREEMENT
OF 1973 WOULD LAUNCH THE CONTENDING VIETNAMESE ON THE
PATH TO EVENTUAL RECONCILIATION. THIS WOULD HAVE RESOLVED
THE AMERICA DILEMMA. BUT IT HAS NOT HAPPENED. HANOI AND
SAIGON ARE STILL FIGHTING; IT LOOKS AS THOUGH THEY WILL
FOR A LONG TIME. IF ONE SIDE OR THE OTHER WERE CLEARLY AT
FAULT, THAT WOULD BE ONE THING. WE ACCEPT, HOWEVER, THE
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JUDGMENT OF A NEW SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE STAFF

STUDY: "LACK OF RESPECT FOR THE AGREEMENT IS SO WIDESPREAD THAT IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO APPORTION RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CONTINUED FIGHTING."

THIS BEARS DIRECTLY ON CONGRESSIONAL EFFORTS TO CUT AID. IT WOULD BE GRIEVOUSLY UNFAIR IN OUR VIEW FOR THE UNITED STATES--BY WITHHOLDING AID--TO PENALIZE SAIGON ALONE FOR A BREAKDOWN WHICH IS PROPERLY THE RESPONSIBILITY OF BOTH VIETNAMESE SIDES. NOR DOES WITHHOLDING AID BECOME ANY FAIRER IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES WHEN IT IS DESCRIBED AS A WAY TO INDUCE PRESIDENT THIEU TO HONOR THE PARIS AGREEMENT AND TO MAKE CONCESSIONS TO HIS VIETNAMESE RIVALS. WE HAVE LEANED TOWARD THIS VIEW OURSELVES IN THE PAST. BUT LOOKING AT THE RECORD OF THE LAST 20 MONTHS, WE HAVE HAD SECOND THOUGHTS. WE NOW CONCLUDE THAT IT IS WRONG TO TRY TO MAKE SAIGON ALONE OBSERVE THE AGREEMENT, TO ITS POLITICAL DETRIMENT, WHEN HANOI IS UNDER NO SIMILAR PRESSURE TO OBSERVE ITS SIDE OF THE AGREEMENT. UNILATERAL PRESSURE, FURTHERMORE, PRECLUDES A NEW AMERICAN APPROACH TO MOSCOW AND PEKING--AN APPROACH WE BELIEVE SHOULD BE MADE--TO REDUCE FURTHER ALL OUTSIDERS' ROLES, ESPECIALLY AS ARMS SUPPLIERS.

THE ONLY CORRECT BASIS FOR PHASING OUT AID, WE NOW BELIEVE, IS A DETERMINATION THAT IT NO LONGER IS IMPORTANT TO THE UNITED STATES WHAT HAPPENS IN SOUTH VIETNAM. A POWERFUL CASE FOR THIS CAN BE MADE: THE UNITED STATES HAS INVESTED AN IMMENSE AMOUNT OF BLOOD, TREASURE AND PRESTIGE IN VIETNAM, WON THAT COUNTRY THE OPPORTUNITY TO FEND FOR ITSELF, AND NOW HAS ITS OWN GOOD REASON TO TURN ASIDE. BUT IF THIS DETERMINATION IS TO BE MADE, WE AMERICANS OWE TO OURSELVES--AND TO THE VIETNAMESE AND TO OTHERS ELSEWHERE WHO RELY UPON US--TO MAKE IT OPENLY. TO PLEDGE FIDELITY BUT TO REDUCE OUR SUPPORT PROGRESSIVELY OR EVEN PRECIPITATELY IS TO UNDERMINE BOTH INTEREST AND HONOR. IF THE CONGRESS IN ITS FATIGUE OR WISDOM--WHATEVER THE MIX--IS TO PARE AID THIS YEAR AND TO THREATEN TO CUT EVEN MORE NEXT YEAR, IT SHOULD HAVE THE COURAGE TO ANNOUNCE THAT IT NO LONGER CONSIDERS THE OUTCOME IN VIETNAM AS A MATTER OF AMERICAN CONSEQUENCE. TO UNCLASSIFIED

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CUT AID WHILE CLAIMING THAT THE CUT WILL ACTUALLY IMPROVE SAIGON'S CHANCES OF SECURING ITS OWN SALVATION IS DOUBLETALK. TO CUT AID WHILE DECLARING THAT THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH VIETNAM WILL BENEFIT FROM THE NEW POLICIES THEREBY FORCED UPON PRESIDENT THIEU IS AT BEST, SPECULATION; IN OUR VIEW, IT IS TOO FLIMSY A FOUNDATION FOR POLICY.

THE ALTERNATIVE APPROACH IS, OF COURSE, TO ACKNOWLEDGE A CONTINUING INTEREST IN THE FATE OF SAIGON AND TO ACT ACCORDINGLY ON AID. THIS IS THE COURSE WE HAVE COME TO FAVOR, AFTER HAVING INCLINED THE OTHER WAY DURING THE PAST 20 MONTHS. WHAT HAS PERSUADED US TO CHANGE OUR VIEW IS LARGELY THE PRIME NEW FACT THAT A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE POLITICAL SOLUTION HAS SEEMED PROGRESSIVELY TO RECEDE FROM REACH. WE THINK THAT AMERICANS WOULD NOT LIKE TO LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE A SMALL NATION THAT HAD STRONG REASON TO RELY ON AMERICAN STEADFASTNESS HAD BEEN LET DOWN. IN THAT SENSE, THE AMERICAN "COMMITMENT" TO SAIGON IS OPEN-ENDED. TO HOLD OTHERWISE IS TO ADVERTISE ONE'S OWN UNRELIABILITY. IT CAN BE ARGUED, WITH ALL TOO MUCH MERIT, THAT THE ASSURANCE OF AMERICAN SUPPORT LETS SAIGON IGNORE AMERICAN EFFORTS TO INDUCE CHANGES IN ITS DOMESTIC POLICIES AND IN ITS ATTITUDE TOWARDS HANOI. THE ANSWER--SURELY WORTH TESTING--IS THAT SAIGON MAY BECOME MORE RESPONSIVE TO AMERICAN ADVICE AS IT BECOMES LESS FEARFUL OF AMERICAN ABANDONMENT.

AID TO VIETNAM SHOULD BE OFFERED ON THE BASIS OF WHAT DOLLAR LEVELS AND WHAT FORMS OF AID (ECONOMIC OR MILITARY) AND WHAT PARTICULAR PROGRAMS WILL ENABLE SAIGON TO TEND EFFECTIVELY TO ITS CITIZENS' SECURITY AND WELFARE. THIS FORMULATION ADMITTEDLY LEAVES MANY LOOSE ENDS, MANY UNRESOLVED ARGUMENTS, MANY UNCERTAINTIES. THERE IS IN THE UNITED STATES AN EVIDENT SHORTAGE OF ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL RESOURCES TO ASSURE SUCCESS. AND WHETHER THE THIEU GOVERNMENT CAN ADEQUATELY RESPOND IS A QUESTION BOUND TO TROUBLE ANY REALISTIC OBSERVER. WE ARE CONVINCED, NONETHELESS, THAT THE PRINCIPLE OF AMERICAN STEADFASTNESS DESERVES TO BE HONORED AS BEST WE CAN, EVEN THOUGH THE PARTICULAR GOVERNMENT BENEFITTING FROM ITS APPLICATION

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IN THIS INSTANCE IS FAR FROM A MODEL REGIME. THERE IS WHERE THE OVERRIDING AMERICAN INTEREST LIES.

END TEXT. KISSINGER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS COMMENTS, ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 11 AUG 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: n/a
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 JAN 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974STATE175411
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: MHS
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740220-0117
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740857/aaaabwqk.tel
Line Count: 158
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ORIGIN EA
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: martinjw
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 08 JUL 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <08 JUL 2002 by reddocgw>; APPROVED <23 JAN 2003 by martinjw>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: WASHINGTON POST EDITORIAL ON AID FOR VIETNAM FOR CHARGE
TAGS: EAID, VS, US, WASHINGTON POST
To: SAIGON
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005